

152-3 RHODE ISLAND'S OUTDOOR RECREATION NEEDS

3-1 Defining Needs

Recreation Planning Information Base

The foundation of this seventh edition of Rhode Island's outdoor recreation, conservation, and open space plan has been built over decades -- this 2003 edition of *Ocean State Outdoors* stands on the "tall shoulders" of the work of many plans, special reports and research projects done in the field over decades. Into this context, it synthesizes and incorporates the results of several new research efforts conducted for this update into a well-established information base on statewide supply and demand for recreation, conservation and open space. Major sources within the state's established information base are the State Guide Plan, and the Community Comprehensive Plans, which summarize broad-based information in their planning approach, and the state's Geographic Information System (RIGIS).

At the state level, under the direction of the State Planning Council, the extensive planning efforts of many agencies are consolidated in a system of State Guide Plans. These plans contain the major state goals and policies for Rhode Island's extended partnership of state, municipal, public and not-for-profit agencies who participate in publicly-funded activities. *Ocean State Outdoors*, as State Guide Plan 152, is the framework plan for recreation, conservation and open space and contains the over-arching statewide goals and policies for these areas of land use.

At the municipal level, since the 1989 adoption of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, all of the state's 39 cities and towns have the responsibility, under state law, to inventory, assess and plan for recreation, open space and natural resources in their municipality, within the context of Community Comprehensive Plans. These locally-prepared and adopted plans are developed according to detailed requirements and the plans must be updated regularly. The Community Comprehensive Plans contain the local goals and policies and the framework for community-based initiatives in planning, conservation, land use and public project development



Research for this Plan Update

New research conducted particularly for the 2003 update of *Ocean State Outdoors*, investigated existing conditions and the current supply and demand for recreation and natural resource protection in Rhode Island from several vantage points. The Department of Environmental Management updated its inventory of publicly-owned state and municipal outdoor recreation facilities. Data collected on existing facilities were entered into the state's Geographic Information System (RIGIS) system. Maps were also prepared to illustrate the number and distribution, by city and town, of certain categories of existing Rhode Island facilities, as compared against national standards.

Three survey projects were conducted to gather information from recreation professionals and the general public on contemporary recreational needs:

- A Survey of State and Local Recreation Professionals, April 2002
- A State Park and Beach User Survey, August & September 2001
- An Outdoor Recreation Demand Citizen Survey, August to October 2002

In addition, during the course of the plan update many recreational, environmental and planning professionals reviewed findings and contributed comments. The Department of Environmental Management formed a Steering Committee for the update including DEM staff specialists and representatives from the Statewide Planning Program and the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association. Members of the Steering Committee held several informational meetings with the RI Trails Advisory Committee, RI Greenways Council, RI Chapter -- American Planning Association, and the Technical Committee of the State Planning Council as the project progressed.

Importance of Needs Analysis in Public Decision-making

Effective analysis of needs and establishment of priorities are crucial in decision-making and resource allocation. Clear identification of public priorities and needs is basic to all good public decision-making and this strongly applies to choices in conserving natural environments and high quality community design. Recreation, conservation and open space are very popular issues, traditionally well-supported by the general public in Rhode Island. Nonetheless, needs analysis for our greenspace system must be done against the backdrop of an always changing social and economic scene. Priorities do shift and interests change somewhat over time and generations. Changes in the make-up and life-styles of our communities, families and households lead to needs for some adjustments in facilities and their support systems. Market-driven threats to critical natural resources, such as fragile habitat and community open space opportunities, increase the urgency for conservation projects in key locations.

Managing, improving and expanding the recreation and natural resource system is always extremely challenging. The challenge is certain to become increasingly complicated as Rhode Island faces mounting pressures of land development, increasing property values and constrained state and municipal budgets. Setting priorities, making effective choices and maximizing resource use depends upon good information systems and sound analysis.

A Multi-Level Analysis Process

Rhode Island has, in place, an inter-connected state and local planning system to provide guidance in planning and policy decisions for recreation, conservation and open space at the state and local level. The State Guide Plan – Community Comprehensive Plan system is intended to provide guidance to the multi-faceted public and private partnerships working to further recreation and natural resource protection efforts throughout the state. Consistency with the goals and policies of this planning system are, in fact, required for all publicly-funded projects, whether public or private.

The greenspace system, which this Ocean State Outdoors plan supports, is vast and composed of many layers and elements. While there is consensus on our overall vision and the statewide goals and policies, built into this system must also be an appreciation that Rhode Island's communities, neighborhoods and resource areas are quite diverse. Often the richness of the environments are due, in part to fragile and complex combinations, often mixtures of natural and built resources. We celebrate this diversity and want to accommodate and support it in our planning. This requires excellent information, and skilled analysis, policy making and project planning. Fortunately, Rhode Island is very capable and, indeed, invested in this kind of multi-level planning. It should be noted that the Recreation Grant Selection Process established in this plan (Appendix A) requires such a multi-level needs analysis approach in its priority rating system.

As we guide our greenspace system into a challenging future we must make our decisions carefully and manage extremely efficiently. All proposed publicly-funded recreation, conservation and open space projects should all be scrutinized to make certain they are consistent with the established goals and policies and that they meet identified priority needs of the state and community level systems. We need a sophisticated approach in analyzing needs if we are to achieve the desired balance of insuring the quality of the larger systems and also allowing the flexibility to add excellent individual projects and components --and in the appropriate locations. Thus, this plan recommends needs analysis be a three level process, as further described below.

Proposed individual projects must be consistent with the following two official plans:

1. State Guide Plan - (multiple elements) for statewide goals and policies
2. Community Comprehensive Plan - for municipal goals and policies, short and long-term objectives and strategies (action items)

Both of these planning documents are updated regularly and they also provide information and guidance on the current needs of the populations and jurisdictions which they serve. State Guide Plans and Community Comprehensive Plans are required to be consistent with each other in terms of goals and policies but will obviously differ in focus and level of detail.

3. Individual Projects

All individual projects, whether construction of a new recreation facility or acquisition of a key natural resource parcel, are located on specific sites and must be studied in terms of their locale. Each individual project must be evaluated for consistency with the over-arching goals and policies of the state and municipality. Each must also be scrutinized individually with regards to the particular site's suitability for inclusion as a natural or built element in the greenspace system. Beyond consistency with greenspace goals and policies, thorough site-specific and project-specific documentation of existing conditions, and the proposed use or design must present a convincing argument about the public value of the proposed project.

Proposals for all publicly-funded projects should include clear written documentation as to the importance of the project as an addition or an improvement to the state and community systems, a statement as to the priority public needs which will be served by the project, a description of how the project will connect with its immediate surroundings and also how the project will relate to the other elements of the greenspace system.

Planning Analysis for Special Places

Good project documentation and needs analysis is also critical in making the case for proposed projects or sites which may be unique, or atypical, because of their value as resources, unusual uses or special design qualities. Projects that may capitalize on important, unusual opportunities, serve special populations or address multi-community, regional needs should be encouraged.

In fact, the most precious of Rhode Island's physical resources are its special places, our great natural and built landscapes, all unique places and defined by their individual characteristics. Stewardship of our greenspace system of natural and cultural resources requires a planning and project management approach which enhances the unique character of each special place within the system and recognizes the intricacies involved in designing, developing and preserving excellent environments.

2003 Research Findings

The facility inventory and the surveys undertaken as background to this Ocean State Outdoors 2003 plan supplied current information on the existing system and the public's opinions about its various aspects. The surveys reported on a very wide range of recreation activities, involving both recreation facilities and natural resource protection. While many of the long-standing, most important needs and demands of Rhode Islanders remained similar to what was reported in past surveys, certain shifts and patterns are discernable in the popularity of activities, frequency of participation and support for some public endeavors. The 2003 research also documented and reinforced information about some emerging and growing uses, trends and management issues.

3-2 Outdoor Recreation Supply

3-2-1 Inventory of Rhode Island Outdoor Recreation Facilities

In 2001 the Department of Environmental Management surveyed State and municipal recreation system managers to update its database of **publicly-owned** outdoor recreation facilities in the state. Thirty-eight of the state's 39 municipalities and the four DEM divisions that operate park and recreation facilities provided updated information. Privately-owned facilities were not included in the update.



Table 153-3(1) summarizes the statewide inventory of publicly-owned outdoor recreation facility sites which collectively occupy a total of nearly 70,000 acres located throughout the state. Six of 1,063 sites in the inventory are federally-owned, 123 are State-owned and 934 are owned by the municipalities, or are State-owned but managed locally. The inventory reports the total number of municipally-owned park and recreation facilities, including those managed by local and regional school systems (see Table 152-2 (9) Percent of Facilities Operated by Schools).

Table 152-3(1)
RI Outdoor Recreation Inventory 2002 Statewide Summary

	Jurisdiction			
	Federal	State	Local	Total
Number of Sites	6	123	934	1063
Acreage	1528	56752	12942	71223
Game Fields (number)	0	41	544	585
Tennis Courts (number)	0	33	405	438
Salt Beach (linear footage)	0	30800	37880	68680
Fresh Beach (linear footage)	0	2065	2255	4320
Public Pools (number)	0	0	11	11
Boat Ramps (number)	0	47	32	79
Campsites (number)	0	1293	249	1542
Picnic Tables (number)	0	1373	717	2090
Bicycle Trails (miles)	0	21	25	46

Source: RIDEM

The inventory records statistics on selected publicly-owned recreation features, by federal, state and municipal ownership. Reported features include number of game fields, tennis courts, public pools, boat ramps, campsites, picnic table, miles of bicycle trails and linear footage of salt and freshwater beaches.

Table 153-3(2) shows the change in public outdoor recreation facilities between 1989 (the last comprehensive inventory) and 2002. It compares the numbers of publicly-owned recreation facilities by major category for 1989 and for 2002 and reports the percentage change over 13 years. This table reports considerable growth in the number of facilities in 14 of 19 categories. Among the major newly - constructed facilities were 33 miles of bike trails and 33 running tracks, a 242% and 165% increase, respectively. These new facilities serve the growing numbers of Rhode Islanders of all ages, who like their counterparts throughout the nation, are walking, biking, and jogging, and large numbers of students involved in track and field events. Two new inventory categories report six outdoor ice rinks and nine skate parks for skateboarding and BMX biking, categories in which Rhode Island had no such facilities in 1989.

Table 152-3(2)
Public Outdoor Recreation Facilities 1989-2002

Outdoor Amenities	2002 Inventory	1989 Inventory	Difference	% Change
Baseball Fields	504	447	57	13%
Basketball Courts	384	340	44	13%
Bike Trails (miles)	46	13.5	33	242%
Boat Ramps	79	76	3	4%
Football Fields	77	100	(23)	-23%
Freshwater Beaches	20	22	(2)	-9%
Ice Rinks	6	0	6	600%
Multi-Use Fields	204	65	139	214%
Picnic Areas	224	137	87	64%
Playgrounds	387	290	97	33%
Public Camp Sites	1293	1314	(21)	-2%
Public Pools	17	13	4	31%
Running Tracks	53	20	33	165%
Saltwater Beaches	43	42	1	2%
Skate Parks	9	0	9	900%
Soccer Fields	141	No Data	-	-
Tennis Courts	488	430	58	13%
Volleyball Courts	38	No Data	-	-

Source: RIDEM

Of particular note is the large (214%) increase in the number of multi-purpose fields. For more than a decade it has been the policy of the State and the Recreation Resources Review Committee to promote, and to give bonus points in grant funding, to facilities which serve multiple purposes. At the municipal level, in most cities and towns there is great demand for fields at certain peak periods of the week, particularly after school and on Saturdays. Developing fields that accommodate different sports is very advantageous, and probably becoming a practical necessity for most publicly-owned facilities. It is likely that the demand for multi-purpose fields will continue considering the current trends of large numbers of participants in both scholastic and league soccer for both males and females of all ages, and growing popularity of other field sports such as lacrosse and field hockey. The data indicate a loss of 23 football fields, but it is known that many fields are now used for both soccer and football as well as track and field events, and it is presumed that a number of fields formerly counted as football fields, were considered “multi-purpose” fields in the updated inventory.

In terms of support systems and design issues relating to the state’s recreation facilities, the inventory also provided information on public transportation and handicap access as follows:

- Thirty-seven percent of publicly-owned facilities within the state are within an eighth of a mile of a RIPTA bus route.
- Roughly half of the facilities in the inventory (551 sites) report some type of handicap access, equipment or programming.

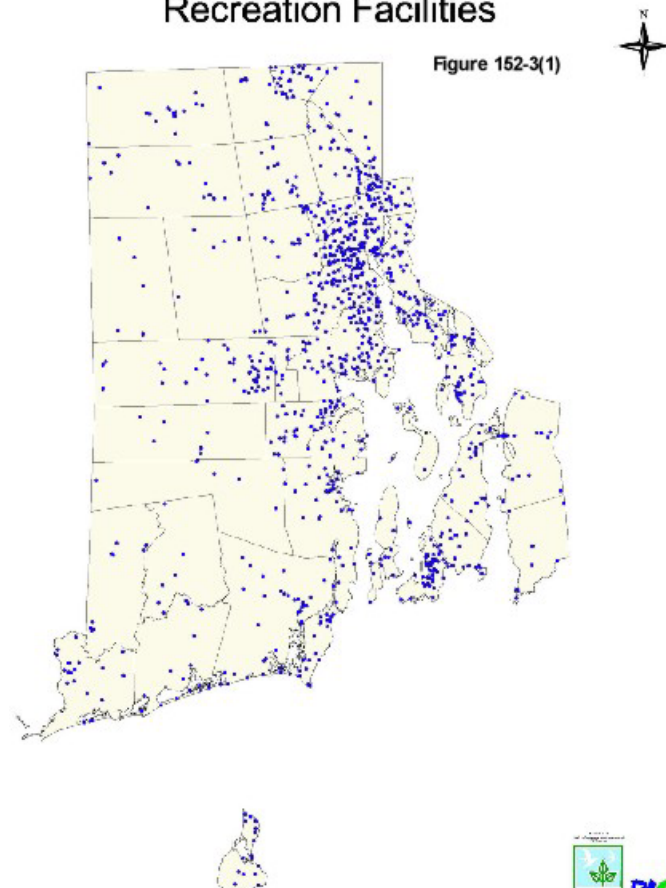
3-1-2 Facility Mapping

The Department of Environmental Management mapped selected categories of publicly-owned outdoor recreation facilities as part of the 2003 Plan update. The Department compiled a series of analysis maps to serve as background to the plan and for future project proposal evaluation. These maps, which were published separately on the RIDEM website, include:

Distribution Maps that identify the locations for 18 types of outdoor recreation facilities throughout the state. Figure 152-3(1) illustrates the statewide distribution of all facility types.

Reference Maps which show generalized, statewide information for Rhode Island including population density, watershed regions, major open space areas, areas having concentrations of minority and/or low-income residents, and the proximity of recreation facilities to Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) bus routes.

Rhode Island Publicly-Owned Outdoor Recreation Facilities



Facility Deficit Maps that identify areas (census tracts or towns) as below, meeting or exceeding outdoor recreation standards of the National Recreational and Parks Association measuring the number of facilities per person. These maps were prepared for study purposes and they depict just one of several standards used in recreation capacity analysis.

Municipal Maps that identify the location of outdoor recreation facilities in each municipality.

3-2 Demand

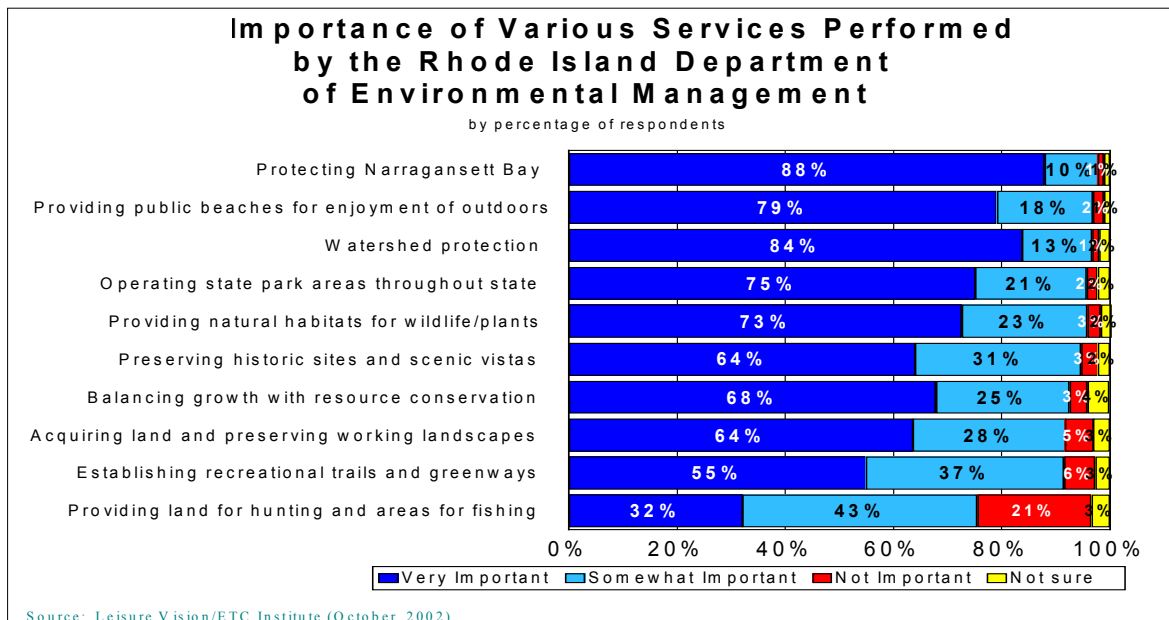
2002 Public Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management undertook a statewide attitude and interest survey from August through October of 2002 to help determine citizen usage, satisfaction, needs and priorities for outdoor recreation in the State of Rhode Island. The private research firm Leisure Vision conducted the survey, which was designed to obtain statistically valid results from households throughout the state. Responses were received from 1,408 households.

Major findings of the survey research include:

- **DEM services valued:** The following services which the Department of Environmental Management performs are considered “*very important*” by significant majorities (73% -- 88%) of respondents: protecting Narragansett Bay, providing public beaches, watershed protection, operating state park areas and providing natural habitats. Figure 152-3(2)

Figure 152-3(2)




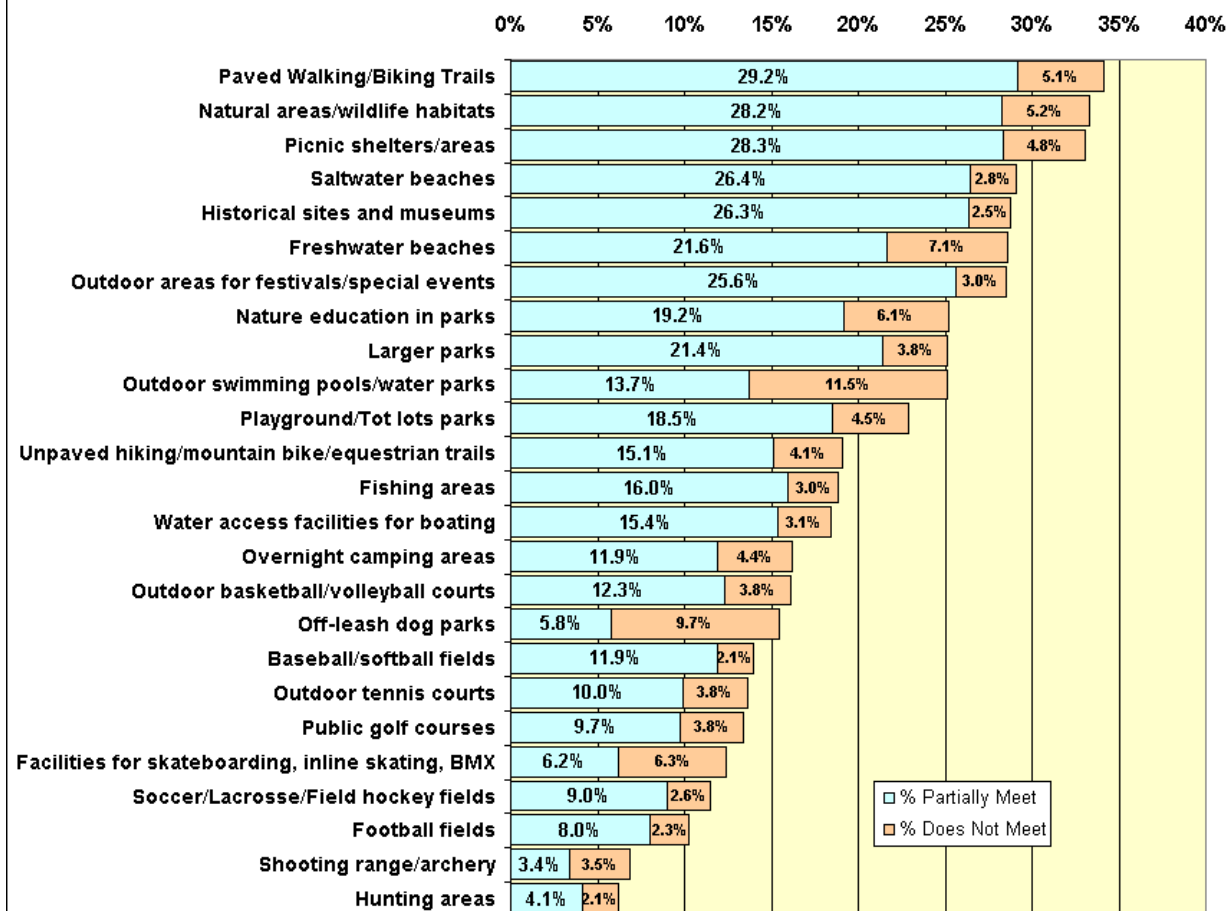
- **State system visitation higher than national average:** Eighty-percent (80%) of respondents had visited state parks, coastal beaches or woodland management areas operated by the DEM during the past twelve months. (The national average for park visitation is 70 percent.) When respondents were asked what keeps them from using state parks more often, 22 percent indicated that over-crowding was a factor. Local parks are used by 72 percent of the respondents, which is comparable to the national average.
 - **State parks rated highly by most:** Although 79 percent of Rhode Islanders consider the overall condition of Rhode Island state parks excellent or good, 20 percent (slightly higher than national averages) rated them as only fair or poor.
 - **Salt water beaches, walking and biking trails, historical sites, picnic areas, festival sites, and natural areas cited as needed by more than 50% of households:** Saltwater beaches was the outdoor recreational facility (out of 26 facility types) that the highest percentage of households (70%) indicated that they “have a need for”. Five other outdoor recreation facilities that over half of respondent households indicated that they “have a need for” included paved walking and biking trails (63%); historical sites and museums (63%); picnic shelters/areas (60%); outdoor areas for festivals/special events (60%); and natural areas/wildlife habitats (58%).
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- **Current system leaves some needs partially met, or unmet.** Using the same list of 26 facilities, respondents were asked how well existing facilities in Rhode Island meet their household’s needs. Figure 152-3(3) shows the number of households whose “needs are being partially met” or “not being met at all” based on 408,424 households across the State of Rhode Island.
 - **Public perceives connection between active lifestyle and individual health:** Over half of respondents (56 percent) indicated that participating in outdoor activities was very important to their health, and an additional 29 percent indicated it was important.
 - **Funding priority is to support maintenance and improvement of existing facilities:** When asked how they would allocate \$100, respondents indicated they would allocate \$37 to the improvement/maintenance of existing state parks, beaches, and outdoor recreation facilities. The remaining \$63 were allocated as follows; acquisition/development of walking, jogging and biking trails (\$17); acquisition/development of new parkland and open space (\$15); development of new coastal beaches (\$12); construction of new game fields (\$9); and development of special facilities (\$8). The remaining \$4 was allocated to “other”.

Figure 152-3(3) How Well Existing Outdoor Recreation Facilities in Rhode Island Meet the Needs of Respondent Households*



*Figures are based upon number of households expressing unmet needs as percentage of total Rhode Island households.
Source: RIDEM

- ***Dedication of system revenues to system needs supported:*** More than three-fourths (78%) indicated they would be either very supportive (43%) or somewhat supportive (35%) of establishing a dedicated funding source made up of park-generated revenue and tax revenues which could only be used to pay for the maintenance and operation of State of Rhode Island state parks, coastal beaches, trails and outdoor recreation areas.
- ***Outdoor water park likely to be used if built at Snake Den Park:*** Just over half (51 percent) of all respondents indicated they be either very likely (31%) or somewhat likely (20%) to visit an outdoor family water park if built at Snake Den State Park.

- ***Local system facilities also heavily used:*** Nearly three-fourths (72%) of respondents indicated they had used parks, trails or outdoor recreation and sports *facilities provided by their city or town* during the past 12 months.
- ***Walking and biking trails cited as most heavily used and most needed local facilities:*** Walking and biking trails (51%) was the outdoor park and recreational facility that the highest percentage of respondent households indicated they had used *within their municipality* in the past two years. Walking and biking trails (33%) had the most respondents rate it in the top four of the most needed outdoor recreational *facilities in their city or town*. Other local facilities among the top five indicated as “most needed” by the Public Survey included neighborhood parks, playgrounds for children, picnic facilities and saltwater beaches.

Estimation of Total Demand

Two statistics from the survey: the *participation rates*, or percentage of the population that engage in each of the various activities, and the average participation frequency, the mean number of occasions per year each activity is engaged are used, along with population data to estimate total annual demand for each activity, and provide ranking of overall popularity for the surveyed activities. Table 153-3(3) shows total estimated annual outdoor recreational demand of Rhode Islanders, and may be used as an indication of the rank or popularity of different outdoor activities among Rhode Islanders. Estimates of both current demand and future demand (based upon preliminary population projections by the Statewide Planning Program) are provided.

2001 Survey of Municipal and State Recreation Professionals

RIDEM's Office of Strategic Planning and Policy conducted a survey of outdoor recreational professionals to obtain their perspectives on the status of the state and local recreation systems and on the public's needs for outdoor recreation. State personnel manage 45 major and minor parks and beaches. State facilities focus on beaches, and the picnicking and camping facilities are larger and accommodate more people than municipal facilities. The 39 municipal professionals manage more than 900 parks, beaches and other areas. Municipal recreation areas typically focus on league sports but also include local beaches and other facilities.

The mail survey included responses from 38 out of 39 municipal recreation directors and 6 out of 7 state recreation managers. The survey design was based on a similar survey performed for the 1992 SCORP with additional questions on trails, transportation availability, funding levels and internet use. The main survey themes of facility supply, funding, planning and management remained unchanged.

Table 152-3(3)
Estimated Outdoor Recreational Demand of Rhode Island Residents

SURVEYED ACTIVITIES:	Participation Rate (%)*	Mean Annual Activity Days*	2002 Total Demand** (Activity Days)	2020 Total Estimated Demand*** (Activity Days)
<i>Walking</i>	66	140.5	97,210,621	102,214,146
<i>Pleasure driving</i>	39	65.8	26,901,962	28,286,632
<i>Visiting coastal areas</i>	61	41.9	26,793,985	28,173,098
<i>Nature watching</i>	31	67.9	22,066,067	23,201,829
<i>Bicycling</i>	35	58.8	21,574,405	22,684,861
<i>Visiting beaches</i>	64	31.5	21,134,111	22,221,904
<i>Jogging/running</i>	19	94.7	18,862,404	19,833,270
<i>Playground activities</i>	26	58.9	16,053,957	16,880,270
<i>Salt-water swimming</i>	47	21.4	10,543,993	11,086,702
<i>Festivals/special events</i>	50	17.5	9,172,791	9,644,924
<i>Basketball (outdoor)</i>	14	58.2	8,541,703	8,981,353
<i>Fishing</i>	22	35.5	8,187,371	8,608,783
<i>Picnicking</i>	42	17.6	7,749,174	8,148,032
<i>Fresh-water swimming</i>	27	25.6	7,245,981	7,618,939
<i>Visiting historical sites</i>	43	15.0	6,761,658	7,109,687
<i>Baseball</i>	11	55.5	6,399,987	6,729,401
<i>Golf (any type)</i>	18	33.1	6,245,885	6,567,366
<i>Fresh-water fishing</i>	17	30.9	5,506,820	5,790,261
<i>Soccer</i>	9	52.2	4,925,003	5,178,497
<i>Softball</i>	8	51.2	4,293,915	4,514,927
<i>Motor boating</i>	16	25.2	4,226,822	4,444,381
<i>Football</i>	8	47.5	3,983,612	4,188,653
<i>Salt-water fishing</i>	18	19.0	3,585,251	3,769,787
<i>Tennis</i>	10	30.1	3,155,440	3,317,854
<i>Sailboating</i>	11	27.1	3,125,039	3,285,888
<i>In-line skating/BMX</i>	6	46.6	2,931,100	3,081,966
<i>Camping</i>	17	15.3	2,726,678	2,867,022
<i>Off road vehicle driving</i>	4	63.6	2,666,924	2,804,193
<i>All day hikes</i>	14	16.9	2,480,323	2,607,987
<i>Skeet or target shooting</i>	3	65.1	2,047,367	2,152,747
<i>Horseback riding</i>	5	36.3	1,902,699	2,000,633
<i>Canoeing/kayaking</i>	15	12.0	1,886,974	1,984,099
<i>Ice skating / hockey</i>	8	20.0	1,677,310	1,763,643
<i>Downhill skiing</i>	7	19.3	1,416,279	1,489,176
<i>Jet skiing</i>	4	32.8	1,375,395	1,446,187
<i>Water skiing</i>	3	34.4	1,081,865	1,137,550
<i>Hunting</i>	3	21.4	673,021	707,662
<i>Scuba diving/snorkeling</i>	5	11.9	623,750	655,855
<i>Surfing</i>	3	13.9	437,149	459,650
<i>Rock Climbing</i>	5	7.0	366,912	385,797
<i>Cross country skiing</i>	3	10.7	336,510	353,831
<i>Snowmobiling</i>	1	11.6	121,605	127,864
<i>Rugby, Lacrosse</i>	1	7.9	82,817	87,080
<i>Windsurfing</i>	1	4.7	49,271	51,807

* Participation rate & activity days derived from RIDEM--Leisure Vision/ETC Institute *Public Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey*, 2003.

** Total estimated annual demand of Rhode Islanders, based on 2000 US Census total population of 1,048,319.

*** Total estimated annual demand of Rhode Islanders, based on preliminary R.I. Statewide Planning Program 2020 population projection of 1,102,277, and assumes no change in recreational preferences.

Note: Due to survey design, estimates include Rhode Island resident demand satisfied outside RI, but exclude demand of non-residents on RI areas.

Source: RIDEM

Major survey findings were:

- ***Similar issues at both level of jurisdiction:*** State and local recreation professionals report similar challenges regarding funding of staff and maintenance, accommodating competing user groups, and satisfying the demand for new outdoor recreation facilities. A need for additional support facilities (restrooms, shelters, parking) was cited by managers in both sectors.
- ***Public preferences for local outdoor recreation activities are changeable, especially in urban areas:*** Thirty-four percent of municipal directors report a decrease in popularity for at least one of the outdoor recreational activities traditionally provided in their community. To varying extents, decreases in baseball, softball, tennis and football were reported. Sixty percent of the directors in urban areas reported a decline in activities traditionally supported by municipal recreation facilities. Recreation directors in urban areas reported they must respond to changes in preferences for outdoor recreation activities more often than did those in suburban or rural areas. State facility managers did not report a significant decrease in their traditional activities.
- ***Increases in certain activities expected:*** Local recreation directors expect soccer, skateboarding, rollerblading, lacrosse, baseball/softball, walking and cycling/biking and rollerskating to rise in popularity in their community. State managers indicate trends towards increased bicycling and horseback riding.
- ***User conflicts remain an issue:*** Managers at both state and local levels report that participants in outdoor recreation activities often disagree on how facilities should be used. Managers reported competition occurring for court and field time, and negative interactions taking place on beaches and trails. Examples of conflicts included horse riders complaining that mountain bikers startled their horses, and families complaining that teenage groups at beaches were too loud. Sixty-one percent of recreation directors reported field use (scheduling) conflicts among school sporting teams, leagues and other field user groups.
- ***Local open space priorities vary:*** Municipalities vary in the type of open space they acquire. While some focus more on the preservation of watersheds, farmlands, and greenway linkages, others mentioned utilizing open space for sporting fields and running tracks.
- ***Universal Design principles becoming common:*** Fifty-eight percent of recreation directors and all State recreation managers report using Universal Design principles to design new or renovated facilities in order that parks and beaches will be more accessible to all outdoor enthusiasts (persons with disabilities, seniors, children, etc).
- ***Uptake on internet as information resource:*** Managers report increasing use of the internet to provide information on outdoor recreation facilities and activities. While fewer than half of the local managers surveyed currently post outdoor recreation information on the internet, another 11 towns have plans to do so.

Among the recommendations of the recreation professionals for action items were:

- Encourage development of more multi-use fields to increase flexibility and maximize use of facilities
- Increase public transportation to all outdoor recreation facilities, especially to under-served communities and populations
- Build more skateparks and pools
- Promote acquisition and development of facilities that serve a region as opposed to a single town or area
- Facilities that are not used to maximum capacity should be converted to promote maximum use.

State Park and Beach User Survey

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management surveyed more than 1,800 State park and beach users in August and September of 2001 to identify the level of satisfaction and important concerns in the State park and beach system. Major findings include:

- **High levels of user satisfaction:** More than 90 percent of respondents indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with eight of the nine performance indicators. Restroom cleanliness scored lower with only 70 percent of users indicating satisfaction. The mean response of participants revealed slightly less satisfaction on weekends as opposed to weekdays, presumably as a result of more crowded conditions.
- **Heavy dependency on automobile access:** Rhode Island State park and beach patrons rely heavily on private automobiles to travel to and from State parks and beaches. Eighty-four percent (84 percent) of respondents arrived at the park or beach in a motor vehicle on the day they participated in the survey, seven percent walked, four percent biked, two percent used public transportation and two percent arrived by boat.
- **High repeat patronage:** Over 70 percent of respondents reported that they visit State parks and beaches five or more times per year.
- **Low use of internet for park information:** Only 27 percent of respondents reported they used the internet to find information about the parks. This coincided with a finding in the public demand survey that word of mouth was the most frequent way that respondents learned about recreation areas.



3-3 Common Threads – Findings on Critical Outdoor Recreation Needs

The following findings and general conclusions on facility and land needs for outdoor recreation are drawn based upon consideration of the three diverse data sources described in sections 3-1 and 3-2 above. When considered together, these sources of information suggest the following general conclusions:

Outdoor recreation is vital to Rhode Islanders

***FINDING:** Outdoor recreation in its many varied forms is a vital component of the lives of Rhode Islanders.*

A consistently woven "thread" running through all three approaches used in the needs assessment is the magnitude and intensity of the public's enjoyment of the outdoors. Rhode Islanders clearly love the outdoors, and "use" it on an astoundingly frequent basis to engage in a wide diversity of recreational activities. The 2002 Public Survey data indicate that the average Rhode Islander engages in some type of outdoor recreational activity, broadly-defined, over three hundred and sixty times per year, essentially on a daily basis. This finding was reinforced by the reports of activity popularity and high facility usage from the State and Local Managers Survey, the statistic on repeat usage from the State Park and Beach Users Survey, and by the heavier than (national) average usage of State park and beach system units reported in the 2002 Public Survey.



Moreover, the data suggest that Rhode Islanders define "outdoor recreation" broadly, encompassing activities as traditional as the team sports of football and baseball, to pursuits such as walking that can be casual and solitary or done with a group, to more individualistic and novel passions such as rock climbing. As diverse as the universe of activities is, however, the common thread is access and utilization of the land and water resource base for relaxation, fulfillment, and enjoyment.

These conclusions -- together with the Survey response suggesting that more than half of Rhode Islanders recognize recreation as important to their physical well-being -- all point to the conclusion that Rhode Islanders have integrated use and enjoyment of the outdoors deeply into their individual lifestyles, a finding having profound social, economic and public policy implications.

Simple Recreation Most Popular

FINDING: *The most popular outdoor activities are those that are most accessible and simplest to engage in.*

Rhode Islanders participate in a wide range of outdoor recreational activities ranging from walking and visiting coastal areas to traditional team sports and hunting and fishing. As diverse as the universe of activities is one common thread in the findings is that the most popular outdoor activities are those that are most accessible and simplest to engage in. The Public Survey found the five top activities, in terms of total demand, are walking, pleasure driving, visiting coastal areas, nature watching, and bicycling. Together, these five activities account for over fifty percent of the estimated total annual recreational participation of Rhode Islanders.

This continues a well-established pattern seen in previous recreation plans in Rhode Island and elsewhere in the country. When it comes to recreation, most people engage in outdoor physical activities that are readily available to them. Non-facility/equipment-dependent activities that are accessible to the broadest cross-section of the population, appear at or near the top of most lists of activity popularity. The 2002 Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey found the top three activities in terms of total demand to be walking, visiting coastal areas and beaches and attending outdoor festivals and special events. This finding has important implications concerning the interrelationships between community design, outdoor activities, and healthy lifestyles. *State and local community design and development practices should seek maximum integration of opportunities for simple, easily engaged-in outdoor activities, such as walking and bicycling, within the fabric of community structure to promote healthy lifestyles and reinforce public health goals.*

Continuing Need for Land and Facilities

FINDING: *Significant needs continue for land and facilities to accommodate public demands for outdoor recreation and protect natural resources.*

A third common thread is the continuing need for investments in land and facilities. All three indicators of need—the State and Local Managers Survey, the 2002 Public Survey, and the State Park and Beach Users Survey -- suggest that continued action is necessary to expand and improve the resource base and facilities available for outdoor recreation. Despite the significant addition of open space land and the addition and refurbishment of recreational facilities supported by the State and local investments of the past decade, the public continues to say their need for various activities and facilities are not fully met, and system managers continue to report user and scheduling conflicts, and constrained resources. These indicators point to a need for additional recreational facilities and to the public's desire for broadened opportunities to engage in outdoor recreation pursuits of various types. In most cases, expanding recreation opportunities and adding facilities will require additional land. The need for additional land for recreation facilities and conservation is also documented (and quantified, to a degree) by the recreation and open space elements of community comprehensive plans prepared by Rhode Island's local governments.



The high levels of importance accorded by respondents in the Public Survey to DEM's efforts in areas such as "providing public beaches", "watershed protection", "providing natural habitats", and preserving historic sites and scenic vistas" is indicative of support for continued resource protection efforts. The public-at-large appears to agree that the need (cited by environmental and land use professionals throughout the state) for permanently protecting significant natural resource areas and community open spaces is highly important and of growing urgency. This support, coupled with the growing consumption of land by development in a burgeoning real estate market, suggest that the State's land protection targets set in the Greenspace and Greenways Plan and State budget documents should be re-assessed soon.

A need for additional recreation facilities was also indicated by local system managers in the survey. Municipal recreation directors reported organized sports to be highly popular among younger Rhode Islanders. The top three sports were soccer, baseball/softball and basketball. This finding should be interpreted within the context of the organized activities which local recreation systems provide, and does not conflict with a broader conclusion that readily accessible, easily engaged-in pursuits are most popular among Rhode Islanders as a whole. In fact walking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity reported by the municipal recreation professionals as well.

Recreation professionals who manage the facilities and schedule events report high demand and competition by user groups, particularly for fields and other specialized facilities such as outdoor pools and skating facilities. The 2002 inventory shows significant investment in recreation facilities throughout the state since 1989. The inventory also reports a major increase (214%) in the number of multi-purpose fields. This coincides with the recreation professionals who said they try to accommodate emerging trends by converting old facilities, among other techniques. There appears to be a trend toward greater sharing of facilities, staff and administration between municipal school departments and recreation departments.



Among the facilities noted as the top “unmet needs” in the survey of the general public are walking and biking trails, natural areas/wildlife habitats, picnic shelters and areas, and saltwater beaches.

Table 152-3(4) compares the perspectives of the recreation professional (state and municipal) with those of the general public regarding needed recreation facilities. The 25 to 27 recreation facilities are listed in order, based upon the magnitude of response reported in the respective surveys.

Urban Needs

A particular sub-set of need relates to the state’s urban areas. Urban residents cited overcrowding and distance as two of the top three reasons that keep them from using State parks and beaches. Two of the State’s major urban parks – Lincoln Woods and Goddard Memorial State Parks— are frequently over capacity during peak periods, and beaches at these facilities have had to be closed on occasions during peak season due to water quality concerns.

Universal Access Needs

While the State has made considerable progress in improving handicap accessibility, only half of inventoried facilities report some type of handicap access, equipment or programming and only 58 percent of recreation managers report using universal design in recreation projects.

Table 152-3(4)		
Rhode Island Outdoor Recreation Facilities Needs		
Needs as defined in...		
Rank	Survey of Local Park & Recreation Directors	Public Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey
1	Skate/BMX/Inline Park	Walking/Biking Trails
2	Soccer/Lacrosse Fields	Natural Areas/Wildlife Habitats
3	Pool/Swimming Facility	Picnic Shelters/Areas
4	Multi-Use Fields	Saltwater Beaches
5	Trails	Historical Sites and Museums
6	Playgrounds	Freshwater Beaches
7	Ice/Hockey Rink	Outdoor areas for Special Events
8	Exercise/Running Track	Nature Education Centers in Parks
9	Baseball	Larger Parks
10	Basketball	Outdoor Swimming Pools/Water Parks
11	Tennis Court	Playgrounds/Tot Lots/Parks
12	Softball	Unpaved Hiking/Mountain Bike/Equestrian Trails
13	Biking Trails	Fishing Areas
14	Recreation Center	Water Access Facilities for Boating
15	Football Field	Overnight Camping Areas
16	Athletic Fields	Outdoor Basket/Volleyball Courts
17	Teen Center	Off-leash Dog Parks
18	Picnic Shelters	Baseball/Softball Fields
19	Senior Center	Outdoor Tennis Courts
20	Ropes Course	Public Golf Courses
21	Public Boat Ramp	Facilities for Skateboarding/Inline Skating/BMX
22	Passive Rec Facilities	Soccer/Lacrosse/Field Hockey Fields
23	Outdoor Festival Area	Football Fields
24	Open Space	Shooting Range/Archery
25	Fishing	Hunting Areas
26	Dog Park	
27	Camp Sites	

Source: RIDEM

Asset Management Necessary to Sustain System

FINDING *Rhode Island's outdoor recreation facilities are important assets for the state and its communities that require investment and operational resource levels commensurate with their heavy usage and documented asset management needs.*

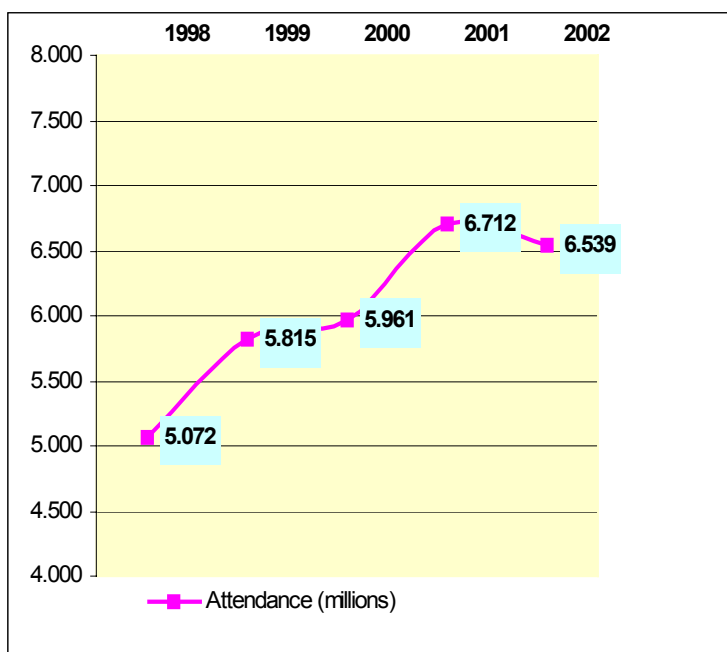
Several statistics from the 2002 Rhode Island Public Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey combined with the reports from the Park and Recreation Managers' Survey, indicate that Rhode Island's outdoor recreation system's assets are straining under heavy usage. The public survey found that Rhode Islanders visit state parks and beaches in greater numbers (80%) than the national average (70%), and that system users felt that there was room to improve the condition of facilities (75% rated facilities as "fair" or "good", 21% as "excellent", 3% as "poor"). These data, combined with DEM figures reporting a 29 percent increase in attendance at state parks and beaches over the last five years, are indications that heavy usage may be taking a toll of "wear and tear" on state system facilities.

This possibility is reinforced by the findings of Asset Management Plans prepared by DEM in 2001 covering the state beaches, parks and forests it manages. These plans found that Rhode Island State parks and beaches have the highest visitation (on a per acre basis) in the country, and identified more than 206 high priority repair and replacement projects with a value of over \$6 million, and found that staffing levels had fallen approximately 40% over the prior ten years, while assets managed had remained largely unchanged.

In the State and Local System Managers' survey, both jurisdictions reported concerns that investment levels were not sufficient to sustain recreation facilities under their control. Thirty-six out of 38 local managers replying felt that their maintenance efforts were under-funded; and 27 of the 38 felt that staffing was under-funded. All six State system managers surveyed felt that both maintenance and staffing were under-funded.

Figure 152-3(4)
RI State Park and Beach Annual Visitation: 1998-2002

Source: RIDEM



The DEM Asset Management Plans recommended a number of options for increasing resources available for maintaining State parks, beaches and forests; including establishing dedicated sources of funding, derived in part from user fees. Seventy-eight percent of respondents in the public survey indicated they were either “very supportive” or “somewhat supportive” of dedicated funding for State parks and beaches derived from user fees and state revenues.

The strategic importance of Rhode Island’s outdoor recreation system’s assets argues for adequate and timely investments to sustain their integrity and quality.

Public Information and Interpretation Needed

***FINDING** Continuing improvement of the information and educational/interpretative resources available to patrons of Rhode Island’s outdoor recreation system is crucial to the public’s knowledge and understanding of the system’s diverse resources, and can assist in balancing system usage.*

The Public and System Managers’ Surveys indicate an opportunity to enhance the information available to the public on the outdoor recreation system’s resources. Although not the biggest barrier cited, lack of knowledge about “what is available” was identified by nineteen percent of respondents in the Public Survey as constraining their usage of State parks and beaches. Lack of knowledge about the locations of trails, and about the locations of parks was cited as a constraint on greater usage by 17 percent and 14 percent of respondents, respectively. Inadequate information can also constrain use of less well known areas and lead to overuse or overcrowding at other, more generally recognized areas.

The internet offers an opportunity to improve information about the State’s recreational resources and activities via a new, and expanding medium. Advantages offered is instantaneous delivery, generally lower cost than print media, and interactivity. However, reliance upon new media outlets cannot completely remove the need for having some traditional (printed) information available for on-site usage and for patrons lacking access to web-based media.



A related issue is the limited educational/interpretative programs. Fewer than seven percent of recreation managers reported the availability of educational programs at facilities they manage. More education and interpretation programs at key facilities, such as naturalists in State parks and beaches, would foster greater appreciation of Rhode Island’s environmental resources.